

[By Brent Curtis](#)

A veterans outreach program in Vermont that has served as a model for other states to follow was approved for another year's worth of federal funding.

Vermont's congressional delegation announced Thursday that the Department of Defense has committed \$2.1 million for a one-year extension of a Vermont National Guard outreach program credited with reaching returning soldiers who wouldn't seek help otherwise.

"Way back in 2007 it occurred to me that in a rural state like ours, soldiers coming home can be isolated," Sen. Bernard Sanders said Thursday during a phone interview. "What we did was put together a team of veterans to go out and visit people in their homes to talk to them and help them get the services that are available to them."

Sanders worked in unison with Sen. Patrick Leahy and Rep. Peter Welch to seek an extension on the program's funding.

The home visit approach worked so well at helping veterans dealing with issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, that Sanders and other officials said seven other states have designed programs modeled after the one in Vermont.

Those states also received funding for their programs on Thursday in an appropriation that totalled \$16 million.

Since 2001, thousands of Vermont Guard members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan — including 1,500 soldiers who just returned from Afghanistan. Not all of them saw combat or experienced lingering trauma from their experiences. But even those in the rear echelon spent months overseas before returning home where challenges with relationships, employment and the adjustment to civilian life awaited.

"In the regular Army soldiers go back to bases where there are services available for them. But members of the Guard go back to their communities. We need to bring the services to them and this service makes that happen," Vermont Guard Lt. Col. Lloyd Goodrow said.

At the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in White River Junction, Andrew Lacasse, the staff assistant to the director, said the outreach service has served the federal medical center well by connecting veterans to VA services they might not have known about.

"It's done really good work for us," he said.